DEPARTMENT OF CALIFORNIA HIGHWAY PATROL

The California Highway Patrol is a law enforcement and traffic safety agency reporting to Business, Transportation and Housing Agency Secretary Maria Contreras-Sweet and Governor Gray Davis.

CHP

CONTACT: **OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS**
(916) 657-7202 Tom Marshall
(916) 657-8639 - FAX

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CHP GROUNDS ITS FLEET OF CESSNA AIRPLANES

(SACRAMENTO) CHP Commissioner Dwight "Spike" Helmick has grounded the Highway Patrol's fleet of new Cessna 206 aircraft.   The grounding was ordered following the forced landing of one of the planes Tuesday near Red Bluff when the engine suddenly died. Pilot John McDermott was able to land the aircraft on a rural strip without incident.

Previously, one other CHP Cessna 206's had an engine failure and another experienced problems with metal shavings in the oil line. As a result of the three incidents, Helmick decided to ground all twelve of the Cessna 206's received so far in a fourteen plane order. All twelve planes were delivered new beginning just last November. They are used statewide for traffic enforcement and other assignments.

"We are taking this major step as a safety precaution," commented Helmick. "Cessna mechanics are already in California helping us determine what the problems are." Helmick says the planes will remain grounded until the problem is resolved, hopefully in the next few days. "Obviously we want to get these aircraft back in service quickly because it's fire season, but safety is the first priority."

Business and Transportation Secretary Maria Contreras-Sweet said, "I support Commissioner Helmick's actions and share his position that officer safety is the first priority in such instances. I am confident the public safety will be served during this interim period."

The 206's replace the CHP's fleet of small airplanes most of which are more than twenty years old. Some of those planes and helicopters will be used for patrols until the 206's are airborne again.

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